



March 2008

an extract from "In Tune"

The Quarterly Newsletter from the Oxford Welsh Male Voice Choir

A short history of the Choir uniform 1970 – 2008 (sounds like Mastermind!)

When I joined the Choir some 38 years ago the dress code was formal for all concerts. i.e. evening dress suit, white shirt, bow tie, black socks, black shoes - cummerbunds were optional. Given the number of differing styles of suits; double breasted, single breasted, single button, double button, normal or flared trousers, plus the different types of materials. Add to this the number of styles of bow ties and their differing materials, and some members adding frilly bits to the fronts of their shirts, and you can see that the combinations were endless. Needless to say, we were far from uniform. Although as individuals we cut quite a dash, we must have looked a rag tag bunch when we were on stage ready to sing.



OWMVC - circa 1983

I remember, before buying my own bespoke suit (a very racy affair with silk shawl collar and 16" flared trousers), I wore a dress suit borrowed from my brother. Unfortunately, he had one leg one inch shorter than the other so I spent most of the time with my thumb stuck in the pocket trying to adjust the wayward leg.

We also had green ties with the choir motif on, with lounge suits or sports jackets and flannel trousers for less formal occasions such as the Rover Retirees, carol evenings, or singing in retirement homes and the like.

Just as a point of interest our first trip to the Rover Retirees 25 years ago, was organised by Glyn Newlands who was a prominent member of the tenor section and a long time member of Morris Motors Silver Band. A small party, consisting of a good balance of voices was invited to perform, this continued for two or three years, prior to it being adopted as a choir commitment.

It was decided by the committee at about this time, that a uniform would improve the appearance of the choir. All members were duly measured. Red blazers and light grey trousers were supplied by Camp Hopson & Co Ltd of Newbury. Members were able to spread the cost of the uniform by paying a pound a week. Over time trousers became worn and were replaced by different shades of light grey, so we were back where we started. This was remedied recently by a mass-purchase of light grey *Farah* trousers. I remember one tenor, after retiring from the car works, putting on so much weight that he had to have 2 inch gussets let into his jacket from armpit to hem. It was very expertly done and the end result was hardly noticeable. We've had two different ties used with blazers. Both striped red silver and grey, the original one, which was from Marks & Spencer, ceased being available and so one with the choir logo was introduced about ten years ago.

Shoes have always been a bone of contention. I remember a certain tenor turning up for a concert in full evening dress and sporting a lovely pair of brown boots, I ask you brown boots (that's put in especially for Roy Hadland), It wasn't until the concert was over that the transgression was notice. The then secretary (Bernard Maliphant) made a bee line for the said tenor, who seeing the look on his face made a sharp exit, never to be seen again. I'm pleased that the committee has also standardised shoes as part of our new uniform.



The new uniform had its first airing rather appropriately at our St Davids day concert, and were we received by the audience! I even thought I heard one or two gasps as the curtain was opened (or was it the swishing of the curtain as it passed by me?). We did look smart and as one. All the comments I have received, from people I have meet who attended the concert, have all been very positive. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our sponsors for their exceptional generosity in making this transformation possible.

I would add a note of caution to all choir members, that before you replace any item of the uniform, due to normal wear and tear, that you consult the guidelines laid down by the committee before you purchase any replacement item, otherwise we'll be back to square one, and you may be denied your place on stage. It is now down to every member of the Choir to make it sound as good as it looks, and I am sure that with our music team lead by Emily, this goal is achievable. Keep in good voice, and I wish you all joyful singing.

Malcolm P Hookham - Choir Marshall.